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A Shaft from the Pulpit

By J. N. KIMBALL

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A Shaft from the Pulpit

J. N. KIMBALL

I do not know how it is at the present time because I have not made a deep study of the matter but when I was a boy there was not a lad in all the country round who did not feel it in his bones that he was cut out to be a sailor, that he was born into the world for that sole purpose and that therefore it was his duty to defy all parental advice, tie his clothes up in a bundle some dark night, and crawl out onto the shed from a back window, drop to the ground and run away to sea. As a rule the door would have given him a much more easy means of exit and would have been fully as safe so far as the other members of the family were concerned, for they were all sleeping soundly in their beds, but the rules of the game as laid down by many a sea tale were very explicit on the point that the window was the proper card to play and so the window it was in every case. When the boy came back, which was usually in about three days, he crawled into the house in the same way without making any noise about it, mindful of the fact that his father had retired for the night and that it would be a sin to wake him up when it was not at all necessary to do so. The prodigal son knew very well that something would

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be coming to him even if it were not the fatted calf, but he was in no hurry about it, he was content to wait until the morning for it, at which time he was sure to get it, good and plenty.

This idea of running off to sea was strongest when the boy was about fourteen years of age, a time when a boy knows more than at any other period in his life, or at least he thinks he does, which amounts to the same thing. In my day this longing to sail the ocean blue came to every lad; he was as sure to get it, sooner or later, as he was to get the measles or the mumps and it is a curious fact that the disease was not confined to those who lived near the sea for the boy on the farm two or three hundred miles inland, far away from the smell of the salt water, was hit just as hard by it. Before my time I have been told that the idea took a more definite form and that not only did the boy want to go to sea, but he wanted to for the sole and express purpose of being a pirate and he used to perfect himself in the trade by practicing on his small brothers and sisters, making them walk the plank and things like that, until he was letter perfect in the part, but in my day the pirate business seemed to have taken a back seat for some reason or other and the flag with the skull and cross-bones was not so much in evidence. Most of my chums who made the night flight did so in order to go to the "Gold Coast" but to tell the truth I doubt if one of them had the least idea of the location of that place on the map.

I never ran off myself, and I often wonder why I did

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not. I have a sort of feeling that I was kept from doing so in some measure because of the experience of one of my friends who tried it. He planned his escape weeks in advance and told us all about it, so of course he was quite a hero in the eyes of the rest of us. He used to talk learnedly about gold dust and sandal wood and other things that were beyond the most of us and would tell us what he would do to the first mate if that individual started in to haze him, all of which was very big and grand and we stood about with eyes and mouth wide open and were ready to fall down and worship him; that is we were for a spell. We knew when he was going as everybody should have known for ten miles around and the next morning, after hearing of his moonlight flight, we talked about him in whispers wondering what we should hear next. It was not just what we expected; the next news that came to our ears was that he had been brought back home, soundly spanked and put to bed and kept locked in his room for a week on a bread and water diet. This last, that is the meagre diet, might have warmed our hearts with sympathy for him if it had not been for the spanking part; there is no heroism in being spanked and his fall in our estimation was something awful. From being a hero he became the butt of our rude jokes and when the rain came down in torrents some dismal day a kid in short pants who would have licked the dust from his shoes a short time before would pipe out "Say, Ned, do they have any weather like this on the Gold Coast?"

I suppose it must have been things like that which

put a damper on my own ardor and made me think twice before acting once until I grew old enough to possess a trifle of sense. But still I never lost my love for the sea. I have it now, only it is a different kind of love, it is not so ardent and is more Platonic, as it were, and has been so subdued by experience that it is greatest when I am furthest away from that same sea, just as some people love grape fruit and pickled olives. As I grew older I came to have a great deal of reverence for the chap who wrote about "a life on the ocean wave and a home on the rolling deep," but times change and a man changes with them; I have sifted my system through with a sieve and gone over it with a fine-tooth comb but I cannot find a trace of that reverence lurking about me anywhere at the present time. And there was that other chap who warbled about being "rocked in the cradle of the deep." I am of the opinion that he was a fraud and that he did all of his warbling while his feet were planted firmly on dry land, and did his sleeping in a comfortable bed; at any rate I have been rocked in that same cradle and have never been in any shape to warble about at the time, in fact I have always felt that the Dead March from Saul played on a bass drum would be more in keeping with passing events.

But be all that as it may, in my young days I took great delight in going down to the wharf to see the stuff which came off the ships which came from foreign shores. There was something about the smell which had a fascination for me; it was so different from anything else that ever hit my smellers. I have spent a

good many days gazing at some old hulk that lay tied to the dock, covered with slime and seaweed and innocent of paint and polish, her iron work red with rust and her sails mildewed and torn, for deep down in her hold I knew there were things that had come from out-of-the-way parts of the world, from places where no one ever had any use for skates or sleds and where the high cost of living need cause nobody to worry for the people were free from the toll of the baker and the tailor. My imagination ran riot at such times and after a day on the wharf I used to go home at night and dream that I was decked out in a brand-new suit of fancy things done in colors all over my body. In fact I even went so far as to start some of that tattooing stuff on my arms, but it hurt me so much that I gave it up before I had half finished the elaborate designs I had planned out. Such parts as I did get pricked into my hide are there yet; sometimes I wish they were not and at other times I rather like to look at them as relics of an age when I saw things through rose-colored glasses.

And when I could coax some member of the crew over to the cask on which I was sitting, bribe him to talk with a new clay pipe that cost me one cent and get him started on tales of his travels, that was living; those were happy days, happier days than I ever expect to see again. But how they could lie, those sailors, I know it now but I did not know it at the time and would not have known it for a fortune. I have said that my imagination played pranks with me in those days and

so it did, but if I now had one-tenth of the imagination some of those sailors had I would start in and write stories of the sea and Clark Russell would not be in the same class with me. And they used to back up all their tales with occular proof, too, for in the midst of some yarn my narrator would bare his bosom and show me mermaids and anchors and stars and full-rigged ships and flags in red and blue pricked all over the front of him; they were probably done by the old masters on South Street but I did not so much as guess it at the time and I am glad I did not.

All this was a long time ago, longer that I like to think about, I will confess that, but even now I cannot walk along the water front without loafing away hours that ought to be devoted to other and better business, looking at the ships that poke their noses clear across the street and almost into the windows of the old shops on the other side. And at every door and strewn along the walk are ancient anchors and anchor chains and coils of rope and odds and ends of things that I do not know the names of although I know they belong to ships; I like to look at them and stand so long that sometimes the chap who owns the place comes out to look at me out of the corner of his eye although he knows that the stuff is too heavy for me to lug off any of it. I am not angry with him however, for I feel it in my heart that I would like to do just what he has an idea that I will do; it is only the old fascination come to life again and for the moment I let it have full swing.

And then again there is the smell; I have spoken of

that already but there is no other perfume that compares with it and it cannot be described in words. It is not exactly spices and odors from Araby, in fact it is a good deal other than that, but it is like the smell of nothing else on earth and it pleases my nose whatever you may say about it. I suppose it comes from the slush bucket and the tar in the ropes and the salt which clings to those old second-hand anchor chains and things but that does not bother me any, I like it. And here is another curious fact; I have spent hours, as I have said, roaming about on the water front and looking in at all the shop doors and at the ships but in the former I have never yet seen a young man, everybody is gray and grimy and grizzled and I am glad that it is so for the stage setting and the actors suit each other down to the ground. They never seem to do any business in those shops and I have never yet seen a sale made in any of them although I have stuck my nose in more than one door trying to catch somebody buying something so as to get a line on what the stuff was worth and how he carried it away. I suppose they must sell things now and then and if they do they must also buy things to take the places of those they sell, but these transactions are all done when I am not on the watch, I am sure of that.

All this is to impress upon you the fact that I still like all things which have to do with the sea. I suppose there was not a lad in the land but felt about it as I did when I was a boy, but whether that feeling survives in other grownups as it did in me I do not know. My

views have changed a trifle to be sure since I was a boy and I have become more practical, as is but natural, for I have had more experience. I love the sea now, but only when I stand on the shore and look at it. I have no wish to run off and be a cabin boy for some grouchy old sea dog for I have been rocked in the cradle of the deep and rocked hard, and I have lived a life on the rolling wave to some extent, all the extent I care for, I think; I do not want any more if I can help it.

My first experience on the water took some of the colors from my rainbow. When I was a lad in my teens a party was made up to go on a fishing trip about thirty miles off shore on a tug and I was invited to go along with some forty other victims. I did not sleep any the night before; it was an event in my short life and I preferred not to undress and go to bed but to sit up and think about it until it was time to start which was about two o'clock in the morning, then I went down to the wharf and got on board of the tug with the rest, and we let go the hawsers and started off. I am not going to detail the voyage for there are some parts which would not look nice in print and other parts when I was not in a condition to do any detailing; it is enough to say that the only person on board who did not pay tribute to Father Neptune was the engineer. We were out twenty-four hours and so many of those hours as I was alive were full of misery; during the time I was dead it did not matter so much, of course. I know that I was washed from stem to stern by the sad sea waves and rolled about the decks and mixed up

with fish lines and bait and stools and everything else that was loose and then I was washed back again to the forward end of the boat when the thing jolted that way but I remember that it did not trouble me because, as I have said, I was dead. And I know I must have reached home at last, else I could not be here now, but how it was done has always remained a deep, dark and dire mystery to me. It was a fishing excursion, as I have said, and somebody caught some fish I suppose, but not I, although I caught everything else which was coming and going. It was bad enough while we were on the way to the fishing grounds but worse when we got there. About the last thing I remember was the rattle of the chains as the anchor went over the bow and then, to all intents and purposes, I died. I do remember one other thing; in one of my lucid moments, which were few and far between, somebody whispered in my ear that if I would stand up I could see Block Island over the weather bow. That was foolish, for I could not have stood on my feet if they had promised me a view of the North Pole. I had other things to think about besides the scenery, but as the tug happened to slant over on its side about then of course I rolled to the bulwarks as usual and on my way I caught sight of something black sticking out of the water away off to the westward; it was only a flitting glimpse for in a minute the boat tipped the other way and I started to roll back again. If they had told me that what I saw was an island in Mars I would not have disputed it, I had too many other things on my mind and I got

rid of the idea as quickly as possible just as I had been getting rid of everything else all the forenoon.

That was the first time I ever saw Block Island and if anyone had told me that I should spend a month on that island every year for twenty-five years I would have killed him then and there. No, that is not so, I would not because I did not have the strength to do so, other than that it would have been wise for him to make his will. However, such is the fact and I have lived on that little island away off in the ocean for more than two years of my life in the aggregate. Being almost a native I came to know all the other natives and as they all got their daily bread out of the sea of course I tried to get a little of mine in the same way. I never made a huge success of it for good and sufficient reasons, but it was a pleasant life all the same. If you go to that tight little island now you will not be able to do as I did because motor boats and gasoline engines have changed things completely; for the better I suppose, but it goes against the grain to think it. In the old days the people who came from the mainland were few in number but now the island is a summer resort of no mean proportions and fishing for summer boarders has taken the place of dropping the lines for cod or jigging for mackerel.

But I must get back to my story and to start right I want to say that while my title may have deceived you if it has done so it is not my fault as it is a right and proper one and to set your mind at rest on the point I will say that a "pulpit" is a thing built on the end of the

bowsprit of a boat and is made of a board to stand on with an iron railing to keep you from falling into the briny deep every time the boat gives a lurch. I do not know who gave it the name but he was a genius for naming things all the same. It is used solely for the taking of the wary swordfish and in the days of which I speak a pulpit was found on all the Block Island fishing boats. Those boats were like no others and hardly a specimen now exists, all having been displaced by motor craft. They were painted green and were pointed at both ends like a dory. They were probably the most seaworthy boat it is possible to build and they would live through a gale that would be death to many a larger craft. The rudder was at one end and the pulpit was built on a bowsprit at the other. Their sole use was for fishing, they were not made for the carrying of passengers and as the fish which were caught on board were cleaned on the spot, after a good many years of hard service they had a smell which was their own private property and belonged to nothing else. It was not like roses and violets to one who made his first trip, but if he kept it up long enough he got used to it and of course did not mind it so much. I have not smelled it for a long time but I should know it again if I should ever run across it, in fact if I were on top of Pike's Peak and should get a whiff of that odor I should at once exclaim "there goes a Block Island fishing boat;" thus custom breeds habit in a man.

As may be guessed the trip I am to tell of was one in search of swordfish. I was urged to go by my friend,

the captain of the sloop, and as I had never been present at the capture of one of these huge fishes I rather fancied the idea and seized the invitation to go out after them with avidity. There was not so much avidity the next time I was invited, probably I had used my whole stock the first time, but that is getting ahead of my yarn. Nobody ever knew a fishing boat to start out on time, but for many a generation it had been the custom for the fisher folk to gather at the wharf at three o'clock a. m. and I was told to be on hand promptly at that time. I set the alarm and then stayed awake all night to be sure I should hear it, as is my custom yet, and when it went off I got up and made a cup of coffee which I drank and then crept out into the night. It was dark. That sentence does not seem to cover it. It was as dark as the inside of a stone jug. That does not seem to fit either for I think it was darker than that and I had a mile to go along the edge of the bluff where a single false step would make me a fit subject for the coroner. I did not hurry for there was no wind and I knew we had to have a wind or we could not go out and there were other reasons why haste seemed useless, one of which was the fact that my accident policy had lapsed. The pathway was narrow but worn smooth and hard and was a thin line of gray, like the thread of a spider drawn along the grassy edge of the cliff, beyond which was a profound depth of blackness. I could tell by the feel, as they say, the moment my feet diverged from that path. I knew every turn and rock in it and was surpised, when I had gotten about half

way, to run across a new boulder that I had never seen before. Dark as it was I could still see a dim black shape loom up across the gray line of the path. It staggered me a bit for I had not supposed there were men enough on the island to lift such a stone and place it where it was. I judged I had lost my reckoning and so I came to a dead stop and took my bearings. I lay down and reached for the edge of the cliff, it was there all right, less than a foot away. Then I put out my hand and felt of that rock; it was warm to the touch and, wonder of wonders, seemed to be covered with hair. I stood up and gave it a kick and it slowly rose until it towered above me like a mountain, then it gave a loud bellow and disappeared in the darkness to the left. It was only a cow which had lain down across the path in peaceful slumber but in that dense blackness it seemed bigger than an elephant. It scared me out of my wits for a minute or two and when I came to my senses and was about to take my revenge it had gone. Where that cow came from and where it went and why it had lain down there with its nose over the bluff has always been a puzzle to me. After I got my breath I pulled myself together and trudged on, trying to reason it all out. Maybe it came to the bluff to listen to the pounding of the surf on the shore forty feet below, maybe not. At any rate she showed no sense in going to sleep in that spot, for if she had got restless in the night and turned over during her nap she would have rolled off the bluff and broken her neck. However I have never seen a cow roll over and perhaps they do not

do it, but all the same I still suspect that cow escaped from some asylum for she had all the ear marks of an inmate of one.

I met no more wild animals and finally reached the wharf in safety to find all the boats tied up and the members of our crew sitting about on benches talking about the weather and whistling for a wind. At about four o'clock a breeze of the lightest, softest kind fanned my cheeks and rippled the surface of the water in the harbor which up to that time had been as smooth as glass and we made our way on board, hoisted the sails and drifted at a snail's pace out through the breach in the breakwater and into the open sea.

I wish I could find words to describe the stillness of such a morning on the ocean. There is absolutely no sound to break the utter silence save the steady boom of the swell as it strikes the shore and which grows less and less distinct as we leave land, the creaking of the blocks in the rigging as the sails, not yet full of wind, flap idly to and fro with the roll of the boat, the gentle swish of the water lapping the sides of the craft, hissing softly as it leaves the stern, and beyond these there is nothing for the crew are as yet hardly awake and nobody says a word. Even when one has occasion to go about the deck he does so with a sort of gliding motion as if unwilling to disturb the profound quiet of the place. For half an hour we drifted lazily along in this fashion, slowly edging away from the land, then the tiny puffs of air from the southeast became more frequent, the booms swung away from the side of the boat, the sails

bellied out and the sheets drew taut and we began to bowl along with a slight tilt to the deck. There was a good bit of sea, just enough to make us rise and fall like one swinging in a hammock. Now I never did like to swing in a hammock and always get out directly if anyone sets it going, but there I could not get out, or rather I did not think it was wise to do so for the walking was not good. It was not long before the effects of that confounded, slow, up-and-down motion began to tell on me and after standing it as long as I could I went below. That was where I made a mistake. I found the only bunk in the cabin already taken by another chap who had come with us and the only place left for me was a shelf about three feet long which ran along the side. I am more than three feet long but I was in no condition to find fault. I had to lie down and so I got up on that shelf and tried to curl my legs up under me but it did not work. At the end of the shelf was a cook stove and not being fastidious I used that as a rest for the lower end of me; it was almost as good as sleeping in a Harlem flat.

For a time I lay there and as the boat stood up on its stern I could look out of the cuddy hole and down to the very bottom of the vast deep and when the boat tilted the other way and stood on its head with its tail in the air, I could see the whole galaxy of stars through that same hole. As the bilge water in the hold got stirred up I began to wish I had not taken that coffee for I knew it was going to be a sheer waste on my part of good material. Then I began to wish I had not eaten

those lobsters the day before, they were fine lobsters too and cost money, and slowly as time went on (every minute seemed an hour) I repented of things I ate last week and then of things I ate the week before that. Finally my repentance drifted away back to the month before last and things were brought to my memory that I had failed to take note of at the time I ate them. At length having little more to fear on that score and having nothing left on my mind or my stomach I fell into a drowse and slept until some one pounded on the hatchway and shouted down for me to get up and come on deck to see the sun rise. It woke me up and roused my temper. I told them that I was not at all curious to see that sort of thing, that the sun had come up a good many times without my help since I came into the world and I guessed it could get along without me this trip; of course if they insisted and would bring the sun down to me maybe I would look at it just to please them, but in no other event would I stir from my perch. I also told them that from the time I had spent on that shelf I judged it must be sunset anyway and if they wanted to go crazy over an old sunset they might do so and be hanged. But I was not to lose the sight for two burly fellows came down and lifted me off my shelf and fired me out through that cuddy hole, landing me on the deck in a heap like a sack of oats; then they sat me up against the mast and propped me in place with a coil of rope. I was mad and was ready to do things and I would have done them too, only they were stronger than I because they retained all the eats they had ac-

cumulated for some time past while I was hollow, like a drum. I had to forgive them and did so the more readily because I was just in time to note an incident which has clung to my memory ever since.

There were two other landsmen on board, one of them was a friend of mine, the occupant of the berth to whom I have already referred and who had crawled out on deck a short time before, and the other a lad of about fourteen, a farm boy from away back in the hills, who was on the water for the first time in his life. My friend lay on his back on the deck from sheer inability to do anything else, he was sick, maybe even more so than I was, and the boy, poor fellow, seemed to be as sick as the two of us put together. My friend was something of a wag and between his spasms he lay and watched the top of the mainmast sway to and fro with the roll of the boat. Finally he turned over and asked the lad if he knew how to climb a tree and the latter groaned out that he did. "Well, then," said my friend, "here is a chance for you. I will give you a dollar if you will climb up and put your hand on top of that mast."

Now if you know anything about a New England farm boy you know that a dollar is a mighty sight of money to him and if he ever gets hold of one it is because he has given value received in hard labor for every cent of it. The boy in question was too ill to stand but he crawled on hands and knees to the foot of that swaying pole and then inch by inch made his way to the top. When he got down again he grabbed that big silver dollar and stowed it away in his pocket with-

out a word, then he flopped down on the deck and started in on the same job he had been busy at all the morning. The mere telling of it sounds tame enough, I will admit, but it was an example of pure grit second to none I have ever seen. To put it mildly the boy was at least as sick as I was, but if five hundred dollars had been tacked to the top of that mast to be mine for the getting it would be there now for all of me; I like money well enough but there are times when I can do without it and that was one of those times.

But that was not what those ruffians dragged me out of the cuddy hole to see. They wanted my expert opinion about the sun and I do not blame them for it deserved it, and from a better judge. My first glimpse showed me the father of light just lifting his forehead over the edge of the horizon and the whole eastern sky was deluged with reds and yellows and oranges and purples such as could not be mixed on the pallet of any painter on earth. As the sun crept slowly above the rim of the sea the colors faded and he alone stood forth in brilliant red, looking like a red hot ball rolling along the edge of the world. And then I turned about and looked back at the land we had left; it was so far away that I could see but a faint blurr but it was a pretty sight, an opal set in the bosom of the sea and changing its color every second with the changing position of the sun. Every wave between us and the eastern horizon was tipped with a border of gold and as the wind caught the spray from their tops it went flying before it like a shower of diamonds. Even the gray and som-

bre sea gulls reflected the universal hue and looked like the painted denizens of some tropical forest. It was well worth all I had gone through with and there can be no greater praise than that.

The fresh breeze in my face soon made me feel a trifle better and when the time came to open the lunch buckets I was ready to take a feeble interest in the contents of mine. The only fault I found with it was the poverty of the outfit; it did not seem to have just the things I wanted at the time. We were now eight or ten miles off the shore and on the ground where it was expected we would pick up a fish or two. The crew ate breakfast and the captain took his place in the pulpit with a harpoon resting in front of him on the iron railing. A member of the crew shinned up one of the masts and tied himself there in a sort of chair made for the purpose; another took the tiller and the rest stood about and kept both eyes open, hoping to be the first to get sight of game. The swordfish is an ugly brute in more ways than one. He is not at all pretty as fishes go and he has a sword some two or three feet long growing straight out of the end of his nose and forming a part of his upper lip, as it were, and he knows how to use it for business purposes when occasion requires. He is the deadly enemy of the whale and I once saw a battle royal between a whale and a swordfish which beat any contest I ever saw in the past or expect to see in the future. The only way the whale can get the better of his enemy is to breach, that is to throw himself entirely out of the water and fall with all his weight upon the fish:

he weighs a few tons and if he has good luck and lands in the right spot he wins. In the case I saw it looked as if a half block of buildings suddenly threw itself twenty feet into the air from the ocean and came down in a huge splash. I do not know which won the battle, but as I saw neither of them after that I presume that the fish got the worst of it and was either smashed into a pulp or retired from the conflict. Many and many a vessel has put into port with a swordfish's sword sticking in its bottom planks, the fish having taken the craft for a whale and tried to puncture it.

A swordfish weighs anywhere from 200 to 1,000 or more pounds and its color is black. It has a black fin on top of its back and when at peace with the world it loafs along with a part of that fin out of the water. That black fin was what we were looking for and it is strange how quickly the eye will detect that tiny black spot in the vast world of water. We sailed about for an hour or two, taking no thought as to direction and had about come to the conclusion that our voyage was to be of no avail when the man at the top of the mast yelled to throw the tiller over and pointed with his grimy finger to the south; he was so much higher up than we were that he had the advantage of us in the matter of seeing things, the fish being at least two miles away. Off we went on the larboard tack and it was not long before we were close to the object of our search. Now all was excitement, although there was perfect quiet on board. The captain poised his harpoon in his hand and made sure that the line which was tied to the

iron ran free and back to the tub on deck where it was coiled, some six hundred feet of it, in such shape that it would run out without a hitch. The man at the helm took firm hold of the tiller and eased her up into the wind or let her fall off as the orders came from the captain. Much depends on the skill of the man at the helm because the pulpit has to be placed almost directly over the fish before the harpoon can be used, this latter being half thrown and half pushed. We were just coming up into the wind in a position which would allow the captain to strike when the fish gave a start and darted away a few lengths of the boat. Here was the entire work to be done over again and with care too for if our movements had been the cause of the change of base of that fish he would be on the watch for us and would be ready to dodge again and again until we lost him. There was nothing to do but to try again so we got into a position where luffing up into the wind would bring us on top of him. This time all went well; inch by inch we crawled toward that black fin until the end of the bowsprit was almost over it and then the captain's arm was seen to lunge forward and the harpoon shaft went overboard while the line ran out at a lightning pace. Somebody threw over the cask and we came up into the wind and sailed off away from the spot for fear that the fish might get ugly and come up through the bottom of our boat and sink us, a thing that has been done more than once.

Away went the cask bobbing about like a cork on the waves until after a time it seemed to stand still and then

the real business of getting that fish began. A boat which we carried on deck was put over the side and in it was put a lance, sharp as a razor, then one of the crew got into the small boat and pulled off in the direction of the cask; it was his duty to take in the line slowly, leading the fish up by degrees, and when within striking distance to give his quietus with the lance. Sometimes the thrust of the harpoon iron will kill or entirely disable a fish but in other cases, as in this instance, it simply holds him at the end of the rope. We lay about a hundred yards from the cask to watch the performance and it was worth watching, in fact, we got more of a show than we paid for. Slowly and with great care the man in the small boat pulled in the harpoon line hand over hand; he could feel the fish but of course it was far too heavy and too lively to be pulled in by main strength. Then came what was near being a tragedy. The man in the small boat sat on the middle seat with his head bent forward slowly coiling the rope as he drew it up when, without notice and without giving any indication of his movements in advance, the fish darted from the bottom of the sea straight at the under side of the small boat, hitting it fair in the center and coming up through the bottom as though that bottom had been made of paper. The sword struck the man in the boat at the bottom button of his vest, ripped off every button on that garment and broke the skin on his chin just a trifle; then the fish sank down out of sight again. The man grabbed off his coat and thrust it into the hole in the boat and yelled for help, for strange to

say, though he had lived on the island all his life and was a fisherman by trade, he could not swim a stroke. We made all possible effort to reach him and did so just as the boat was getting so full of water that it was about to sink. He climbed aboard and we took a turn of the boat's painter around a cleat and sailed away, fearful lest his majesty might try another venture with the larger craft for a target. As soon as we were out of the danger zone we lifted the small boat aboard and tacked a piece of tin over the hole in its bottom so as to make it water tight and making out the cask again bobbing on the surface a mile or so off steered towards it. Again the small boat was put over and the same man got into it and rowed to the cask. Slowly and carefully he pulled in the harpoon line and this time he had better luck. He raised the fish in a fairly peaceful frame of mind close to the edge of his boat and with one thrust of the sharp lance the thing was over.

If there were any mermaids roaming about they are probably talking yet about the yells that came from our passengers, my friend, the farm boy and myself. We sailed alongside and after rigging up a block and falls lifted the huge carcass on deck. As I remember it now, it seemed as if he was a hundred feet long and weighed two tons but I suppose that ten or twelve feet including his sword, would be nearer the mark for length and that he weighed about six hundred pounds. He was built like a torpedo and his war head looked about as dangerous. When he is in a hurry to go somewhere I doubt if there is anything else that swims which can catch him and

the whole finny tribe give him the right of way. His meat is white and firm and the people of Boston eat him; I have eaten him myself many times and I applaud their judgment.

What a fish it was! I could not help feeling that it was almost a sin to take the life of such a monster and might have been inclined to shed a few tears over his bier if he had not looked so much like a wicked old pirate as he lay tied to the rail.

We cruised about all the rest of the morning but finally the sea became so rough that we could not see things and had to give it up. The crew, all but the man at the helm, sat about on coils of rope and pieced out their breakfast from what was left in their buckets and the rest of us, as the water grew rougher and rougher, got rid of what little we had eaten of ours. Then the work of getting our catch ready for the market was begun. In the old days the fisherman used to cut off the head and throw it overboard, sword and all, but he does not do that any more, or at least not until he has cut off the sword and taken out the boney eye sockets which find a ready sale to summer visitors and souvenir hunters. The sword is scraped and polished and is often carved and painted as well and the eyes are sold to ladies for jewelry boxes and pin cushion cases.

The cleaning took a half hour or so and then everything was made spick and span and we came about and ran before the wind straight for home. While the excitement was at its height I forgot all about the rolling and pitching of the boat and enjoyed the fun as much as

any of the crew but when it was all over I had a relapse and fell into a condition where I should have been glad to welcome the torpedo of a submarine. I was like the fellow in the story who was at first awfully afraid he would die and as time went on was equally afraid that he would not. But I am lucky in one respect and that is that my insides behave themselves the moment I set foot on land. I have known those who feel the motion of the boat for days and weeks after a trip on the water.

However, we were headed for land and my agony would soon be done. That was the thought which passed through my mind, but it was counting my chicks before the eggs were laid. Out of the southwest came a black bank of fog and it covered us like a blanket, while the wind, which up to that time had been fresh and right astern, veered around on our quarter and then all of a sudden seemed to remember a job it had left undone in some out-of-the-way corner of the world and started off to attend to it and we were left rolling like a log in that dense fog with just headway enough to keep us pointed toward shore and unable to see a boat's length ahead. My friend was right when he advised me to cheer up for there was nothing so bad that it could not be worse. The only comfort I had during the rest of the trip came from the fact that misery loves company and I took a devilish sort of delight in taking note of his. We were in some danger but that did not trouble me, I left that to the crew and was rather glad of it because they had not been sick. We were in the path of the homeward bound fishing fleet and more

than once the black hull of some schooner loomed up for an instant dead ahead and was gone again like a sort of marine ghost. It got on the nerves of the crew and punished them for the unkind remarks they had thrown at me during the day. They were afraid of being cut down and left to drown while so far as I was concerned nothing would have pleased me more. About ten o'clock at night the fog lifted for a spell and gave us our position about half a mile from the light on the end of the breakwater, and in a half hour we had sailed through the breach and into the basin and were tied up at the wharf.

As I remember it that was the most delightful moment of the trip. I am glad I went, just as I am glad to have seen a nice moving picture, but nobody wants to see the same picture twice.

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